

Quiz A: RI.5.2

Read the passage. Then answer the question.

“Centralia: The Fire Still Burns”

- 1 During the early 1960s, Centralia was a small but thriving town located in east-central Pennsylvania. Most of its 1,400 residents paid little attention to the vast network of abandoned mines that extended underneath the town’s businesses and houses.
- 2 In May 1962, the town officials decided to clean up Centralia for a Memorial Day celebration. Part of this effort included burning a garbage dump. On May 27, 1962, the fire department set the dump ablaze. However, the fire also ignited an outcropping of coal and soon spread to a coal vein that ran underneath the town.
- 3 At first, the fire did not alarm most people. They knew that given the needed resources and equipment, the fire could be extinguished. In an effort to save money, though, the government tried a series of half-measures to put out the blaze, which failed miserably. As a result, the fire began to spread through the coal mines underneath the town. These mines contained slow-burning anthracite coal.
- 4 For years, many of Centralia’s residents ignored the fire; others denied that it even existed. However, during the 1970s, carbon monoxide began to seep into some of the houses, making people sick. Then in 1981, 12-year-old Todd Domboski was walking through his grandmother’s backyard. Suddenly, he sank through a sinkhole caused by the underground fire. Todd screamed and frantically grabbed onto tree roots to prevent falling into a hot, smoking abyss. Luckily, his cousin reached into the hole, grabbed Todd’s arm, and pulled him out.
- 5 This incident sparked a debate among Centralia’s residents. Some considered the town unsafe and wanted it to be relocated. Others opposed this approach. Then in 1983, the federal government stepped in and set aside \$42 million to buy and destroy all the buildings in Centralia. Most of the people in the town agreed to the voluntary buyouts. In fact, by 1990, only 63 people remained in the town. These 63 people, though, proved difficult to move. Even though the underground fire continued to burn, the remaining residents claimed that their homes were not located in dangerous areas.
- 6 During the 1990s, Centralia’s residents blocked efforts to condemn their homes. As a result, legal efforts to move everyone out of Centralia grounded to a halt. In the 2000s, the state increased efforts to move people out, and by 2010, only five occupied houses remained. These buildings stand amidst a grid of vacant lots. The businesses, schools, and churches remain only in the memories of the few residents.
- 7 Centralia, though, is still a popular destination. Tourists often arrive to take pictures of the smoke rising from the cracks in the pavement. Also, scientists come to study the volcanic minerals in the cracks. And of course, newspaper and TV reporters come every so often to do believe-it-or-not stories. In fact, the remaining residents often feel that their town is more like a museum exhibit than an ordinary town.

